

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Statement on World Press Freedom Day

May 3, 2010

World Press Freedom Day is observed every year on May 3 to remind us of the critical importance of this core freedom. It is a day in which we celebrate the invaluable role played by the media in challenging abuses of power, identifying corruption, and informing all citizens about the important issues that shape our world. It is also a day for us to sound the alarm about restrictions on the media, as well as the threats, violence, or imprisonment of many of its members and their families because of their work.

Last year was a bad one for the freedom of the press worldwide. While people gained greater access than ever before to information through the Internet, cell phones, and other forms of connective technologies, Governments like China, Ethiopia, Iran, and Venezuela curtailed freedom of expression by limiting full access to and use of these technologies.

Moreover, more media workers were killed for their work last year than any year in recent history. The high toll was driven in large part by the election-related killings of more than 30 journalists in the Philippine province of Maguindanao, the deadliest single event for the press in history, along with murders of journalists in Russia, Somalia, Mexico, and Honduras. In this year, like in other years, nearly three out of four of the journalists killed were local news-gatherers who were murdered in their own nations.

Chauncey Bailey was one such local journalist. A tireless reporter who covered his own city of Oakland, California, Bailey was widely respected for his many exposes of abuse and corruption. He was gunned down 3 years ago near his office while taking a homeless man to breakfast. A trial of the alleged perpetrator is scheduled to begin this summer. Such accountability is critical to deterring further attacks. I note with concern that the murderers of journalists succeed in avoiding responsibility for their crimes in nearly 9 out of 10 cases and urge fellow governments to address this problem.

Even more journalists and bloggers find themselves imprisoned in nations around the world. Iran, following its crackdown on dissent after the last elections, now has more journalists behind bars than any other nation. Governments in Belarus, Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, North Korea, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela imprisoned journalists who wrote articles critical of Government leaders and their policies.

But for every media worker who has been targeted, there are countless more who continue to inform their communities despite the risks of reprisal. On World Press Freedom Day, we honor those who carry out these vital tasks despite the many challenges and threats they face, as well as the principle that a free and independent press is central to a vibrant and well-functioning democracy.

NOTE: The statement referred to Yusuf Bey IV, who allegedly ordered the 2007 murder of journalist Chauncey Bailey.

Categories: Statements by the President : World Press Freedom Day.

Names: Bailey, Chauncey; Bey, Yusuf, IV.

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